

Glen Carbon, "The Valley of Coal"

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The silhouette of a coal miner, Glen Carbon's logo, reminds village residents and visitors about the history of Glen Carbon. The village's name, which means "Valley of Coal" also describes its location. This small southern Illinois village lies on top of seven veins of bituminous coal near the Mississippi River Bluffs. In its 110-year history, Glen Carbon has successfully coped with many changes.

Samuel Judy, a Swiss immigrant, was the first permanent settler in Madison County. He and his family settled near the American Bottoms flood plain in 1801 to farm the fertile soil. Other farmers from the Eastern United States and Europe also came to the Madison County area during the 1800s to make a living in agriculture. In the late 1800s, two of the area's natural resources, coal and shale, attracted industry to the region. In 1884, the St. Louis Brick Company established a brickyard and made bricks from the shale clay from the bluffs. During the late 1880s, several railroads were built that passed through the present Glen Carbon area. The Madison Coal Corporation opened two coal mines and a coal washer near the railroads, which allowed the company to ship the coal to other towns. These two companies greatly increased the population by attracting workers to the area.

With a population of approximately 400, the townspeople voted on June 6, 1892, to incorporate Glen Carbon as a village. The size of the village was rather small, less than two square miles. Businesses such as a general store, theatres, ice cream parlors, a

butcher shop, a bottling company, saloons, and doctor's offices were established within the village. A school and several churches were built. Organizations such as a volunteer fire department, German singing society, baseball teams, and fraternal organizations were founded. But mining was the most prosperous industry in Glen Carbon .

In the late 1800s and early 1900s Glen Carbon was a coal producing city like the surrounding small towns of Maryville, Edwardsville, Collinsville and Troy. During this time, the nation depended on coal for its energy supply and Madison County ranked fifth in coal output in Illinois. Glen Carbon also had a farming community much like other surrounding towns. Glen Carbon also attracted European immigrants such as Bohemians, Italians, Germans, Polish, Irish, Welsh, Russians, and people from other cultures. Many Europeans during this time fled from persecution, looked for opportunities in the United States, and settled in Madison County.

Glen Carbon, however, was different from most of these surrounding small towns because it was a "company town." Much of the land was either owned by the Madison Coal Corporation or the St. Louis Brick Company. Both companies built saltbox type houses for their workers to rent. The Madison Coal Corporation owned about 100 homes for their workers. The St. Louis Brick Company constructed similar company homes for their workers. The general store was owned by the coal company for a while. The coal company also donated land for churches, parks, and a village hall. It provided recreational facilities such as tennis courts, playgrounds, and baseball diamonds. LeRoy Harris, a 91-year-old lifetime Glen Carbon resident and former coal mine worker said, "This was a benevolent company. They did a lot for the village. They kept the streets up.... They put coal ashes on the roads so we had pretty decent roads in the winter. The

coal company donated money for the graduation picnics." Some coal company officials were involved in the village's politics. The coal company worked for the good of the village.

In the early 1900s, Glen Carbon continued to grow to a population of about 1,100 mainly because of the prosperous coal mining industry. In 1906, the St. Louis Brick Company burned down and never rebuilt. Glen Carbon flourished even during the early years of the Great Depression because the coal miners had steady jobs. But then, suddenly in April 1931, the Madison Coal Corporation shut down their last coal mine. The newspaper stated that there was a rumor about the mine shutting down because of a warm winter and general conditions in the coal industry. However, others believed competition with Peabody Coal Company was responsible for the mine's closing.

The closing of the mine in 1931 and the Great Depression changed the village from an industrial community to a residential area. Harris explained, "We never really did lose any population after the mines shut down." People kept their houses, because the coal company let them have them pretty cheap, for about \$30 a room. So people stayed here and commuted to work. The population stayed pretty steady, about 1,200, for years. The people commuted to work in other cities like Granite City, Alton, Wood River, and East St. Louis. But many village businesses closed. The population stayed at 1,200 until the 1960s when Interstate 270 was opened and Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville was built and attracted people to nearby Glen Carbon. Subdivisions sprang up and the population increased. Glen Carbon became southern Illinois's fastest growing community in the 1970s. Today Glen Carbon is still growing with a population of approximately 10,500 residents and many businesses are moving to Glen Carbon.

People of many nationalities immigrated to the Glen Carbon area to find work and raise families. How the ethnic diversity of the village affected the development of Glen Carbon has not been adequately researched. It should be covered to learn how so many cultures got along, worked together, and kept the town surviving through the village's changes.

Today, if you ride through "Old Town" Glen Carbon you can still see some of the old saltbox houses but no visible remains of the mines. The railroad tracks have disappeared and have been paved into a bike trail. The village has changed from an industrial village to a pleasant residential community with successful commercial businesses. As Harris concluded, "It's been a great town...with a lot of changes." [From Susan Crain Bakos, "In the Land of Goshen," *St Louis Commerce*, (Sept. 1982); Mark J. Cedeck, Joan Foster, et al., *A History of Glen Carbon; Centennial History of Madison County, Illinois and its people 1812 to 1912*; "Glen Carbon in '92 up to the Present," *Edwardsville Intelligencer*, (Aug. 15, 1957); "Glen Carbon Mine Will Close When Men Clean Entries," *Edwardsville Intelligencer*, (Apr. 17, 1931); "Glen Carbon: Thriving Mine Village," *Edwardsville Intelligencer*, (Sept. 14-21, 1912); "Glen Carbon Traces Roots to Coal Mines," *Edwardsville Intelligencer-Answer Book*, (Sept. 27, 2002); "Old Glen Carbon Tour," *Goshen Preservation Alliance*; "Heritage Trail," *Belleville News-Democrat Sunday Magazine*, (Sept. 26, 1993); "The League of Women Voters," *Know Your Village: Glen Carbon*; Teri Maddox, "Glen Carbon at 100," *Belleville News-Democrat*, (June 14, 1992); "Mines May Close," *Edwardsville Intelligencer*, (Apr. 17, 1931); Dick Norish, *A Pictorial History of Edwardsville and Glen Carbon*; Jennie Raffaele, *A History of Glen Carbon*; "Residents say Glen Carbon 'older person growing

young,” *Metro-East Journal*, (Mar. 10, 1971); “Village of Glen Carbon,” *Edwardsville Intelligencer*, (June 8, 1892); Student historians interview with LeRoy Harris, Glen Carbon (Sept. 14, 2002).]